

Digest of District Computer Services

This audit was conducted in response to a request to review the staffing levels at District Computer Services Section (DCS) within the Utah State Office of Education (USOE). The request was generated by a legislator who thought that staffing has not decreased even though in fiscal year 1990 DCS consolidated with the Division of Information Technology Services (ITS) in the Department of Administrative Services. Further, there was a concern that one of the largest customer school districts recently decided to stop using DCS and perform its own data processing, which raised questions about the staff necessary given the assumed reduction in workload.

We found that DCS staffing has decreased, both at the time of the consolidation and again shortly afterwards. Further, although DCS and ITS consolidated, the only functions taken over by ITS were the responsibility for telecommunications lines and the actual machine processing of data. DCS is still responsible for all support of districts' data processing. We also found that the decision by Jordan School District to conduct more of its data processing independently is not a total withdrawal of business from DCS. Several computer applications will continue to be done for Jordan at DCS, and Jordan will continue to be DCS's largest customer. Therefore, we do not believe that a recommendation to reduce DCS staffing is appropriate at this time.

Additionally, we believe that a policy decision is needed to guide DCS's future course as it implements new data processing systems based on the use of personal computers (PCs). An issue that must be addressed is whether DCS has the resources to efficiently provide support for both the existing mainframe system and two new PC-based information systems, as is presently intended. The implementation of these new systems will represent a basic shift in the type of data processing provided by DCS to districts, and may affect the agency's mission, operations, and even organizational structure. DCS needs to assess staffing with the change in focus in mind. Because implementations are projected for fiscal year 1995-96, a review of the decision to support both types of information systems must be made soon.

The following briefly summarize our findings in each area.

Two Changes at DCS Have Resulted in Staffing Decreases. As a result of a partial consolidation with ITS and an internal reorganization of USOE data processing, DCS staffing has decreased from 51 in early 1989 to 30 at the end of fiscal year 1994. Further, although DCS and ITS consolidated, the only functions taken over by ITS were the responsibility for telecommunications lines and the actual machine processing of data. All staff support of districts' data processing still takes place at DCS. Thus, the consolidation did not mean that ITS has taken over all of DCS's functions.

Jordan's Decision Will Affect DCS Only Moderately. Because of a concern that Jordan School District's withdrawal from the state system would result in a great decrease in work (thus staffing needs) at DCS, we reviewed the withdrawal. We found that although Jordan School

District is in the process of removing much of its data processing from the state system, there will be significant work still done at DCS for the district. Even with the removal of many fiscal and student programs, Jordan will remain the state's largest customer district, according to our estimates, with over \$200,000 in billings. Finally, the revenue will be lost mainly by ITS, not DCS.

Upcoming Changes at DCS Require Reassessment of Staffing. In response to consultants' recommendations, DCS is involved in two major special projects that will provide PC-based data processing systems to school districts in both fiscal and student information applications. DCS programmers are currently rewriting the mainframe fiscal programming for personal computers, while the student information staff are involved in the purchase process for new PC-based student software. The agency plans to provide the choice to districts of moving to the new systems or staying on the mainframe systems. We believe that this plan needs to be carefully considered and a policy decision made by the State Office of Education and the Board of Education as to whether supporting both computing environments is the best use of resources, especially in light of staffing changes that may be needed to support the PC systems and related networks.